

Testimony before the CGA Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing on Proposed FY 23 Adjustments for Higher Ed Agencies

February 22, 2022

Submitted by Seth Freeman

Thank you, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives Dathan and Nolan, and members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Seth Freeman, I am President of Congress of CT Community Colleges (4Cs). 4Cs represents community college faculty and staff across our twelve community colleges and part-time faculty at University of Hartford. I am also a Professor at Capital Community College and resident of West Hartford, CT.

I am writing to express our unions strong support for ensuring our community college system is sufficiently funded so we can serve our students and communities. We support the Board of Regents request for additional funding for our community college system. Increased funding is necessary to ensure we can provide high-quality services to our students and communities.

We have seen services in our colleges decline in recent years due to understaffing and insufficient resources. Understaffing in our colleges is a contributing factor to low enrollment. We have seen key departments in our colleges understaffed, such as Admissions, Marketing, Financial Aid, High School Transitions, and Student Activities. Understaffing in each of these areas directly hurts both enrollment and retention.

In the recent Board of Regents Finance Meeting, the BOR Finance Committee proposed a 5% tuition increase for students. Our union strongly disagrees with increasing tuition on our students. We disagree because so many of our students are already struggling to balance their school, work, and family demands. Increasing tuition continues to shift the burden of education to those in our communities with the least resources.

It is worth remembering that we live in one of the richest states in the richest country in the world. Yet, hundreds of thousands of CT residents – roughly 10% of residents - live below the poverty line. Broken up by ethnicity our states poverty data is even worse. Roughly 19% of African Americans, 21% of Latinos, and 30% of Native Americans live in poverty. Our state – despite our vast wealth – has one of the largest ratios of income inequality in the country.

Our state should be a leader in eliminating the racial wealth and income divide. But doing so would require bold investments in underserved communities and policies that prioritize the poor and working class in our state.

Bold investments are not happening in our public higher education system. Rather, chronic underfunding has been the norm.

Unfortunately, chronic underfunding and enrollment declines led to the Board of Regents to their misguided decision to merge our community colleges. This merger – originally sold to save money – has not resulted in savings. This is because the merger has ballooned the number and salaries of managers in our community college system. Over the past three years the Board of Regents and CSCU managers have hired dozens of managers – Regional Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents –

costing millions of dollars. These management positions are completely redundant, wasteful, and are siphoning resources away from community college campuses.

Now, the Board of Regents for Higher Education is threatening to layoff student-facing community college employees. This is reprehensible and abhorrent. Laying off staff who directly serve our students will only further the understaffing of our community colleges. This understaffing, along with the complete demoralization and disenfranchisement of community college employees over the past four years, will only continue to hurt our community college students.

Our public higher education system needs more resources so we can fulfill our mission of providing pathways to higher education, gainful employment, and life-changing knowledge and skills to the residents of CT.

In public higher education, as in all public services, our state needs to commit to do more for our marginalized, underserved, poor and working class communities, not less.

Thank you each very much for your support for public higher education in our state.